

Danish Church Records Series: Extracting Genealogical Information

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The one thing that discourages beginner genealogists from Danish research is the inability to read and interpret the Danish language and the Gothic handwriting. Although it can be difficult to read the old records, it is possible for anyone to do. All that is needed is a few tools of reference, a basic strategy, and lots of practice.

YOUR TOOL BOX

There are three important tools of reference that you need in your tool box in order to interpret the Danish records well:

1. **Danish-to-English key word list.**

When beginning to interpret Danish records it is helpful to have a key word list with you. This is a list of words commonly used in the records, such as born, died, named, parents, etc. After a while, you may not need the word list anymore, but until then it is helpful to keep one at your side.

A basic key word list is provided at the end of this handout; however, for a more thorough list and for translations of church record headings, go to the FamilySearch Wiki (Denmark page) found at the following web addresses: https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Danish_Word_List and https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Denmark_Parish_Register_Headings.

2. **Feast Day Calendar.**

There are many records, especially before 1800, where the priest recorded the day as a feast day rather than a numerical date. A feast day is a day celebrated by traditional Christian religions. Easter and Christmas are two such days. For example, if a priest was recording the burial of a Lars Larson as a feast day he would have written the date as "Christmas day 1755," rather than "25 December 1755." As another example, rather than recording the marriage date of a Jens Jensen and Karen Olsdatter as "20 March 1785," the priest wrote "Palm Sunday 1785." Unless you have every feast day memorized, it is necessary to have in your tool box a Feast Day Calendar. These are available in book form, as well as on the internet. A free copy is available at:

https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Moveable_Feast_Day_Calendar_for:_Denmark and https://familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Fixed_and_Moveable_Feast_Days_for:_Denmark

3. **Gothic Handwriting Examples.**

For centuries, the Danish people used an archaic font known today as Gothic handwriting. It is always wise to have a sample of the gothic handwriting in your toolbox to help you recognize hard to read letter. A sample of the Gothic letters is provided at the back of this syllabus. The

best way to learn how to read this font is to practice writing it yourself. The sample of Gothic letters provided at the back is also a practice activity. Also, there are videos at the FamilySearch Learning Center that give further instruction on how to read the handwriting. See the following web address for the videos:

<https://familysearch.org/learningcenter/results.html?fq=place%3A%22Scandinavia%22>

Remember, the best way to recognize your ancestor's name is to write it yourself in the gothic font.

YOUR STRATEGY: FILTER AND FOCUS

One of the best strategies for reading the Danish records is *Filter and Focus*. In this strategy, it is not necessary to translate every single word on the page. Many times, the records contain “flowery language” or unnecessary descriptive words. With *Filter and Focus*, only the necessary genealogical words are identified and translated. Let's look at an example in English.

A birth record may state, “On the 12th of August a son was born to the honorable, God-fearing mayor, Anders Krejberg.”

If we *filter and focus*, we see that the birth on the 12th of August is important, the child's gender is important and the father's name, Anders Krejberg, is important. All other words, such as ‘honorable’ and ‘God-fearing,’ are nice to have but do not provide information that would help further the research. The descriptive word, ‘mayor,’ may or may not be necessary. It is obviously the father's occupation, and if there were two Anders Krejbergs in the parish it would be extremely helpful to know that your ancestor is Anders Krejberg the mayor, and not Anders Krejberg the farmer.

So how do we *Filter and Focus*? There are five steps to *Filter and Focus*:

1. Identify the Record Type

The first step is to identify what type of record you are looking at. Is it a birth record or death record? Is it a confirmation record or marriage record? When you first begin extracting information from a record, look for a heading, a frequently used word, or other words that tell you what type of record it is.

2. Identify the Names

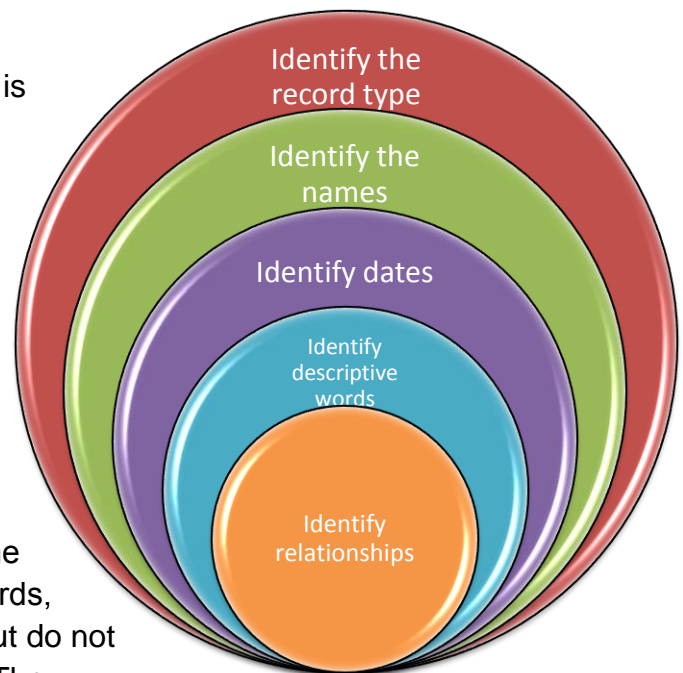
The next step is to identify names. Usually, names are the easiest to recognize. By identifying the names, and most importantly, who the record is about, it will be easier to identify the other parts of the record.

3. Identify Dates

The third step is to identify dates. This could be either really easy or really difficult depending on if the dates are fully written out or not.

4. Identify Descriptive Words

After identifying the dates, identify descriptive words that tell you what is happening in the record. For example, the Danish word “fra,” or “from,” is neither a date nor name, but informs us where a person is from. Use your key word list to find some of the descriptive words.



5. Identify Relationships

Finally, identify relationship words. Search for words such as father, mother, sister, and brother – words that inform you how individuals are related.

Example:

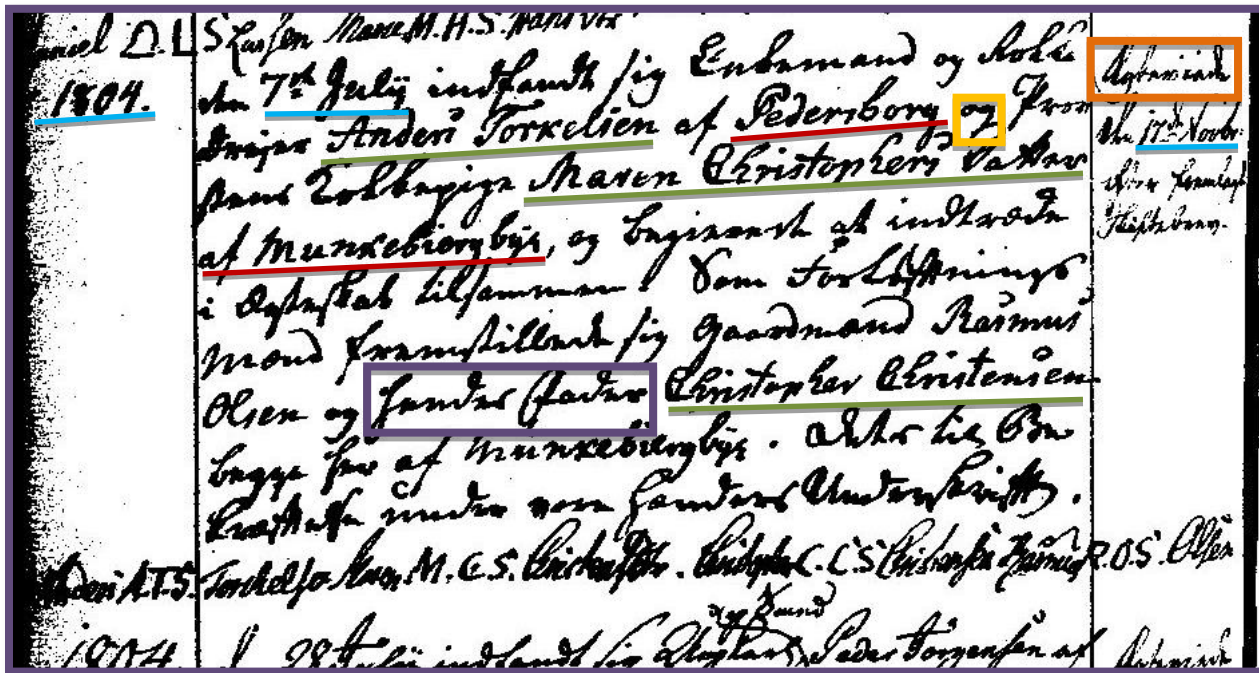
Record Type:

Names:

Dates:

Descriptive words:

Relationships:



By using *Filter and Focus*, you will spend less time laboring over records, and more time researching your ancestors.

Key Word List

| Danish | English | Danish | English |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Af | Of | i | In |
| Afgangslister | Moving Out List | Jordet | Buried |
| Barn | Child | Kaldet | Called, Named |
| Begravelse, Begravet | Burial, Buried | Kone | wife |
| Blev | Became/was | Konfirmation | Confirmation |
| Broder | Brother | Kvindekøn, Kvindekjøn | Female, Women |
| Bruden | Bride | Mandkøn, Mandkjøn | Male, Men |
| Brudgom | Groom | Moder/Mor | Mother |
| Copulerede, Copulation | Marriage | Moster | Aunt(Mother's sister) |
| Datter | Daughter | Navn | Name |
| Døbte, Dåb | Christened/Christening | Og | And |
| Døde | Died | Pige | Girl, Single |
| Enke(mand) | Widow(er) | Paa/På | On |
| Fader/Far | Father | Side | Page |
| Faster | Aunt (Father's sister) | Søn | Son |
| Flyttet | Moved | Søster | Sister |
| Forloverne | Engagers/Engagement Witnesses | Tilgangslister | Moving In List |
| Forældre | Parents | Trolovet | Engaged |
| Fra | From | Tvilling | Twin |
| Fødte | Births | Udlagt | Given, reported |
| Gift | Married | Ugift | Single |
| Gårdmand | Farmer | Uægte | Illegitimate |
| Her | Here | Vielse, Viet | Marriage, Married |
| Hos | With | Qvindekøn | Female, Women |
| Husmand | Cottager/small farmer | Ægte | Legitimate |
| Hustru | wife | År | Year |